

# Combat terror but respect human rights, nations told

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KUALA LUMPUR: Terrorism should be countered with a healthy respect for human rights, not at the expense of those rights, said Amnesty International South-East Asia campaigner Rob Godden.

"We tend to forget that the basic aim of combating the threat of terrorism is the protection of human rights," he said.

Godden who referred to terrorism as "political violence," said the tragedy was that it violated the right to life, the most fundamental human right of all.

He said it was important for countries to appreciate why they were promoting homeland security in the first place.

"It is the state's responsibility to promote security in order to protect human rights, not at their expense," he said in an interview in conjunction with Human Rights Day.

Godden said the argument

that human rights impeded the effort to counter terrorism was misguided.

He said that in situations where human rights had been relegated or neglected in order to "fight terrorism," there could be other political factors at play which had little to do with the preservation of the right to life.

"You have to question what the aim really is in opposing such forms of violence," he said.

"Look at the way the government of Israel has responded to acts of violence by Palestinians, a situation Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has highlighted many times.

"We see the violation of international human rights standards without any progress towards a lasting solution or to a lasting peace," Godden said.

He added that to counter the violation of rights perpetrated by those who used political violence with further viola-

tions by the military or police only led to an escalation of animosity, such as was being witnessed in the territories occupied by Israel.

"In the end, draconian provisions that fail to abide by international law have the effect of undermining, and in some cases, destroying the rights of all," he said.

Godden said the past year had been a challenging one for the human rights movement, including those in Southeast Asia, due to the impact of Sept 11 and most recently, the Bali bombings in October.

"Many governments have produced, or are in the process of producing, anti-terrorist legislation which undermines many hard-won human rights," he said.

He also said there had been a continued growth of civil society in Asia, which included all kinds of non-government organisations, including human rights groups.